

Executive Registry

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THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY
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PRESIDENT'S ROOM

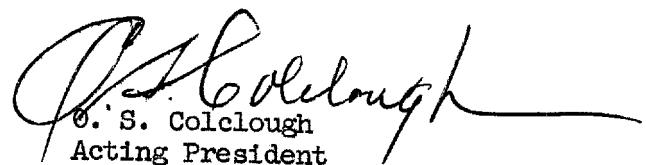
June 8, 1959

Dear Director Dulles:

I write to thank you for your gracious note. It was an honor and a privilege to confer upon you, on behalf of the University, the honorary degree recognizing your high service.

I am happy to enclose a copy of my remarks to the Graduating Class. Your generous comment with respect thereto is appreciated.

Most sincerely,


O. S. Colclough
Acting President

The Honorable Allen W. Dulles
Director, Central Intelligence Agency
Washington, D.C.

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THE CHARGE TO THE GRADUATING CLASS OF 1959

ACTING PRESIDENT O. S. COLCLOUGH

Members of the Graduating Class:

The words spoken by the President of the University, in this instance the Acting President, as he and the Graduating Class stand facing each other at this point in the Annual Commencement, traditionally have been referred to in the Program as the Charge. On this occasion, however, they could have been listed as the Request. May I ask that you think of what I am about to say in that context.

As you, who have just received the accolade for study and for work accomplished here at the University, move forward on the pathways of your lives, I make the request that each of you consider the desirability of consciously devoting a portion of those lives to active support of the cause of freedom.

A basic issue at this time, quite simply, is whether that cause shall prevail--not only as an ideal, but explicitly as the governing force in the world of today and of the tomorrows.

The ideal can be expressed in many ways, but in no wise more illuminatingly than in the Declaration of Independence, beginning

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,"

I need not quote further--you know it well.

At one time in history, this ideal, in and of itself, may have been sufficient--self-generating, so to speak--but that is not now the case. It can no longer be "isolated from other significant constituents of human life." Its challengers adopt the well-known technique of misinterpretation and distortion of freedom's ideals. Confusion results. Consequently, only through clarification, valid interpretation, and forceful, enlightened communication can the enemies of freedom be effectively answered and hence overcome.

If this premise is sound, and I believe it is, then a few words about freedom would seem to be in order.

We hear it said by the distorters of freedom that ours is a

negative approach, that, as the late Carl L. Becker reports from a conversation with a Soviet scholar, our American freedoms "are mostly freedoms from something, whereas the Russian freedoms are freedoms to do something." This view misses the point, in that it ignores the very nature of freedom, and resorts to the Soviet concept of government, to define freedom in terms of the grant of privileges by the state. In the immortal words of Lincoln, ours is a "government of the people, by the people, for the people."

To those belittlers, who would misrepresent our system by arguing that the freedoms created by the Constitution are mostly defined in terms of protection from governmental influence, I would say that we do not seek protection from our government, unless we mean protection from ourselves.

Freedom, as expounded by the Founding Fathers, and pursued today, recognizes the basic principle that a self-governing people must, if freedom is to prevail, provide self-imposed restrictions. Unrestricted freedom, of course, becomes mere license. On the other hand, responsibility, without the checks of freedom, leads to arbitrary power. As Jefferson said, "Every government degenerates when trusted to the rulers of the people alone."

As we are all aware, the term "checks and balances" is used in connection with the doctrine of separation of powers within the framework of the three branches of our Federal Government. I submit that freedom itself depends upon a system of checks and balances; that there shall be unification and reconciliation, to the best advantage of freedom on the one hand, and responsibility on the other. It has been said, "Freedom is the coin of the realm in the kingdom of human worth and dignity, and the coin has two sides. On one side are inscribed the rights and privileges of free men. On the other side are the responsibilities. Unless both sides are genuine and deeply cut, the coin is counterfeit."

To appreciate the basic issue, we must contemplate the wellspring of power. In many parts of the world today, those who espouse communist ideology are being listened to attentively. Yet, such espousal fails utterly to deal with the source of power being established in the faith of the governed.

May I draw upon the field of art for illustration. That eminent lawyer Loren D. Stark, recounting a conversation with the Italian master, Guido Fulignot, quotes him this wise, "What you put on the canvas is an expression of your inner self. If that inner self possesses no absolute truths, then only confusion can be transferred to the canvas...without faith in eternal principles, your paintings are bound to be superficial." Superficial, indeed, is the communist painting being offered in attractive color, forms, and compositions to the world today.

With the philosophy of freedom, however it is expressed, millions agree. The difficulty, I suggest, is that the freedoms, lavishly bestowed upon us, are taken too much for granted for this period in history. One only needs to remind himself of the areas of the world in which freedom has been, or is being, lost.

The preservation of freedom depends upon the efforts of the free; and by effort, I mean ever-thoughtful and intelligent attention to the principles of freedom and to their interpretation, as reflected in public and international affairs and in our daily lives. We must understand them and we must discipline ourselves to devote far greater effort towards their preservation.

Members of the Graduating Class--you go out tonight with the confidence of your University--a trust--born of mutual interests and respect. Then, may I again make the request that you dedicate a portion of your lives to the cause of freedom, not merely to approve it, but to understand the cause, to communicate that understanding, and to further the cause through that spirit of service which freedom inspires, while communism enslaves.

May God bless you in your service.